Sea of Marmora

Windmill on Shore of Sea of Marmora.

THE Sea of Marmora—or the Propontis, if one wishes to be classical—and its shores, have probably been the scene of more stirring events in history than any body of water of similar size. It is little more than 100 miles long and some forty miles across at its broadest point. Thus it is about the same size as Lake Champlain. The Marmora is a sort of vestibule between the outer and inner doors of the Black sea—the Dardanelles and the Bosporus.

The Marmora and the Black seas are no more than twenty miles apart at their nearest point, but it is astonishing what a difference in aspect twenty miles may make. The Marmora has much of the softness of air, vividness of color, and beauty of scenery that we associate with the Aegean and Ionian seas. Thread the narrow slit of the Bosporus, however, and you pass into an entirely different world—sterner, barer, rockier, colder. It is partly perhaps that the Black sea is very much larger.

While its two historic gateways—the Dardanelles and the Bosporus—are strategically the most important features of the Marmora, that picturesque little sea has a character of its own, and one not to be caught from the deck of a Mediterranean liner or from the windows of the Orient express. Such impressions as the passing tourist takes away are chiefly of the flat and treeless Thracian shore. The longer Asiatic coast, however, is much more indented, and rises on the southeast to the white peak of the Bithynian Olympus. A high, green headland divides the eastern end of the Marmora into the two romantic gulfs of Nicomedia and Moudania. The south shore again is broken by the mountainous peninsula of Cyzicus.

Off its windy western corner lies a group of islands, of which the largest is the one that gives the Marmora its name—a mass of marble ten miles long, famous from antiquity for its quarries. Another considerable island is the long, white sandspit of Kalolimnos, just outside the Gulf of Moudania; but best known are the Princes Isles, a little archipelago of rock and pine that is a favorite summer resort of Constantinople.

Cities on Its Shores.

In any other part of the world this inland sea would long ago have become a place of sojourn for yachtsmen and summerers, so happily is it treated by sun and wind, so amply provided with bays, capes, islands, mountains, forests, and all other accidents of nature that make glad the heart of the amateur explorer. As it is, the Marmora remains strangely wild for a sea that has known so much of life; yet its shores are by no means uninhabited and between them plies many an unhurried sail.

The focus of this quaint navigation is, of course, Constantinople, standing high and pinnacled on either side of the crooked blue crack that opens into the Black sea.

The busiest town in the Marmora after Constantinople is Panderma, on the south shore, joined to Smyrna by a railway that taps one of the most fertile districts of Asia Minor. In its vicinity exists one of the few borax mines in the world. Another little railway climbs through the olive yards of the Gulf of Moudania to Brusa, on the lower slopes of Mount Olympus. This delightful town, the first capital of the Turks and their most picturesque city, is the Hamburg of the Levant, enjoying a renown of many centuries for its hot mineral springs. It is also the center of an ancient silk industry, first introduced from China in the Sixth century by Emperor Justinian. Its cocoons are considered to rank in quality above those of northern Italy and are much exported to this country and to France.

Another ancient watering place of the Marmora is Yalova, in the wooded hills above the Gulf of Nicomedia, whose baths were visited of old by Emperor Constantine, and there are many less frequented hot springs in this region.

More numerous than the settlements of today, however, are the ruins of yesterday. Every harbor, every headland, has some fragment of ancient masonry, and the workmen in the vineyards are constantly turning up coins, pieces of broken pottery, bits of sculptured marble, that have come down from who knows when or where. About no body of water in the world, of equal size, have stood so many stately cities.

Question of the Straits Centuries Old.

The true question of the straits arose as early as the Fifth century, B. C., when Alcibiades of Athens counseled the people of Chrysopolis, the modern Scutari, at the southeastern extremity of the Bosporus, to take toll of passing ships. Yet another aspect of the question of the straits had already risen earlier in the century, when the Persian expeditions against Scythia and Greece crossed the Bosporus and the Dardanelles. What success they had we know, and how a counter-invasion under Alexander crossed the Dardanelles in 344 B. C., crushing the Persians at the battle of the Granicus.

It was in the period following the death of Alexander, when the kingdoms of Bithynia, Pergamos and Pontus flourished in northern Asia Minor, that the cities of the Marmora began to take on their greatest importance.

Chief among them was Cyzicus, on the southeastern side of the peninsula of that name. Founded earlier than Rome or Byzantium, possessed at different times by Athens and Sparta, by the Persians and Alexander, by the king of Pergamos and the republic of Rome, Cyzicus was long celebrated as one of the most splendid cities of the ancient world. Its gold staters were the standard of their time.

With the rise of Byzantium, however, its glory passed away. Goths and earthquake ravaged it; Constantine and the Turks found it an inexhaustible quarry for the public buildings of Constantinople. Today there is almost no trace of its marble among the vines and olive trees of the peninsula.

Nicomedia and Nicaea, in Bithynia, were also accounted no mean cities in their day. Indeed, Nicomedia, bequeathed to Rome with the rest of his kingdom by Nicomedes III, in 74 B. C., became for a moment, under Emperor Diocletian, the capital of the world. As for Nicaea, it has three times been a capital.

Nicaea, now Isnik, is not in all strictness a city of the Marmora, but the lake on which it lies is geologically a continuation of the Gulf of Moudania. A place of importance long after the Bithynian period, it is chiefly remembered today for the two councils of the church which took place there in 325 and 787.

Brusa, Too, Is Celebrated.

A third Bithynian city, which we have already mentioned—Brusa—has more than one title to celebrity, not least among which is that its foundation was ascribed to the advice of no less a personage than Hannibal. At any rate, the great Carthaginian fled after the Punic wars to the court of King Prusias of Bithynia and committed suicide there, in 183 B. C., to escape falling into the hands of the Romans. Legend has placed his grave on the north shore of the Gulf of Nicomedia.

Space fails to make even the barest catalogue of the cities of the Marmora that have enjoyed historical renown. Mention might be made of Rodosto, to which Bulgarian raiders came in 813, in 1206, and in 1912, and where the Hungarian royal exile, Francis II Rakoczy, lived for 18 years and died in 1735.

More eastward still lies Silivri, the Athenian colony of Selymoria, which Emperor Anastasius I made the terminus of the great wall he built across Thrace from sea to sea—precursor of the modern lines of Chatalja. Then there is Chalcedon, now an Asiatic suburb of Constantinople, founded a few years earlier than Byzantium by colonists from Megara and renowned for the magnificence of its public buildings, for the councils of the early church which took place there, and for the memorable sieges it sustained against Macedonians, Persians and Saracens.

The history of the greatest city of them all, Constantinople, has for nearly 2,000 years been largely the history of the little sea that lies before it. It was founded, a little later than Rome, by seamen from Megara.

How to Place Piano

It is always a good plan to place the piano a few inches from the wall of a room, especially if it is against an outside wall. The dampness coming through often ruins the tone of an instrument.

Why We Burn Yule Candles

In the first few centuries of the Christian era Christmas was called the "Feast of Lights," and many lights were displayed on the occasion.

The lights were symbolical of the religious light dawning upon the world at that time, and of the advent of the "Light of Lights," and the conquest over moral darkness. Hence arose the domestic ceremony of Christmas candles. The Yule log was the poor man's candle.

How "Gobs" Got Name

The term "gob" as applied to sailors in the United States navy originated from a Chinese word for sailor. This term first came in use when the American fleet was making a cruise of the Far East, says Liberty.

Why Sparks Fly

Sparks that fly from fire are caused by the ignition of the carbon.

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